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ABSTRACT

The Illinois project entitled Measurement and Evaluation of Public Library Services is being conducted by the Library Research Center (LRC) at the University of Illinois. The long range goal of the project is to make available meaningful information for the evaluation and improvement of local public libraries. Two immediate objectives are to test the Public Library Association (PLA) performance measures manual in a representative sample of Illinois public libraries of various sizes and to teach a sample of library personnel the data collection techniques necessary for applying the PLA performance measures. Since operating expenditures proved to be the significant variable related to library size, public libraries were stratified by operating budget for the four areas of the state, and a random sample drawn. The LRC staff held six workshops to teach the PLA procedures to staff from the library systems and from the selected public libraries. Trainees were then asked to conduct a three-day performance measures study in their own library, tabulate their data, and send the results to the LRC, along with comments on the manual. When all of the data is received, the LRC will create individual library profiles and establish performance levels for libraries of each budget level. (Author/SL)

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Measurement and Evaluation of Public Library Services

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Introduction

The Illinois project entitled "Measurement and Evaluation of Public Library Services is being conducted by the staff of the Library Research Center at the University of Illinois. The project was funded by the Illinois State Library from LSCA Title I monies. It is a part of the Illinois State Library's long-range program for library development in Illinois. The long-range program includes the development of a "program of measurement and evaluation to assist library administrators at the local, system, and state level," and of a "program of research on problems common to libraries and library systems to facilitate the continued improvement of libraries at all levels."[1] The project also complements the work of the Public Library Association's Committee on Public Library Goals, Guidelines, and Standards; and the Illinois Library Association's Standards Committee.

The long-range goal of the research project is to make available meaningful information to assist public library administrators, library board members, governmental officials, and interested citizen's in the evaluation and improvement of their public libraries. Some of the more immediate objectives of the project

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[1]Meeting the Challenge: Illinois State Library's Long-Range Program for Library Development in Illinois, 1974-79, Sec. 106.2 and 106.3.

IR 002 379

are to:

(1) test the PLA performance measures manual in a representative sample of Illinois public libraries of various sizes,

(2) teach a sample of Illinois public library personnel and library system personnel the data collection techniques necessary for applying the PLA performance measures, and

(3) explore the relationship between the PLA measures and library-community characteristics and ILA standards.

Characteristics of Illinois libraries

The Illinois public library statistics for 1972-74 show that of 532 public libraries in the state the majority are quite small and have a low annual income. Two hundred and ninety three or 55% of these libraries serve populations of less than 5,000 persons; 372 or 70% serve populations of less than 10,000 persons. If one excludes the Chicago Public Library statistics, one sees that the public libraries of the state serve populations ranging from 250 to 127,000 persons.

One finds a similar pattern in regard to annual tax income, operating expenditures, and collection size for these libraries. Two hundred, eighteen libraries or 41% have annual tax incomes of less than $10,000; and for 330 of the libraries or 62% have annual tax incomes of less than $25,000. The total annual operating expenditures for these libraries is as follows:

Less than $10,000 - 197 libraries - 37.0%

$10,001 - $20,000 - 96 libraries - 18.0%

$20,001 - $50,000 - 84 libraries - 15.7%

$50,001 - $100,000- 62 libraries - 11.6%

$100,001- $300,000- 65 libraries 12.2%

Over $300,001 - 28 libraries 5.2%

The total collection size of the public libraries in Illinois is:

Less than 100,000 volumes - 177 libraries - 33.2%

10,001 - 20,000 volumes - 158 libraries - 29.6%

20,001 - 40,000 volumes - 79 libraries - 14.8%

40,001 - 60,000 volumes - 32 libraries - 6.0%

60,001 - 100,000 volumes - 29 libraries 5.4%

100,001 - 300,000 volumes - 21 libraries 3.9%

All but eleven of the state's public libraries belong to one of the state's eighteen library systems. For the purposes of this project we divided the libraries into four geographical areas:

(1) The Chicago suburban area (excluding the Chicago Public Library and its branches). There are 134 public libraries in this area and four public library systems (Suburban, North Suburban System, Starved Rock, and Du Page Library Systems).

(2) The northern Illinois area with 122 public libraries and three public library systems (Northern Illinois, River Bend, and Burr Oak Library Systems).

(3) The Central Illinois area with 180 public libraries and six public library systems (Western Illinois, Illinois Valley, Rolling Prairie, Great River, Lincoln Trails, and Corn Belt Library Systems.)

(4) The southern Illinois are with 96 public libraries and four public library systems (Lewis and Clark, Cumberland Trails, Shawnee, and Kaskaskia Library Systems.)

Three library systems were not included in the project. The Chicago Public Library because of its size and complex nature and the Shawnee and Starved Rock systems. The latter two were excluded when we drew our sample of libraries. None of their member libraries were selected in the sample. All of the public library systems agreed to help coordinate the project in the member libraries in their area.

Sample Design

As mentioned earlier, one objective of the project is to test the PLA performance measures manual in all sizes of public libraries in Illinois. For statistical purposes, it was considered important to have significant and roughly equal numbers of libraries representing each major library characteristic. Consequently, four variables: population served, total operating expenditures, geographical area; and SMSA (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas) category data for all of the public libraries in Illinois were fed into a stepwise multiple regression computer program. The results of this analysis showed that the variable of total operating expenditures was the most revealing size variable, and

little was to be gained by categorizing libraries by the additional variables.

The public libraries in Illinois were then stratified on the basis of total operating expenditures and the four geographical areas already described. A total random sample of 61 libraries was then drawn from the four geographical areas, each of which had been divided into six operating expenditure strata. Alternate libraries were also selected in the same manner in case they were needed.

Of the original stratified random sample, 38 libraries agreed to participate. Twnety three libraries from the alternate list agreed to serve as substitutes for those libraries in the original sample that had decided not to participate. In this way, each substitute was chosen on the basis of its similarity to a library that had declined.

The project was well received by the public librarians of the state. They had been hearing and reading about the performance measures for some time. The member libraries of the North Suburban System had partially gone through the performance measures the previous spring. For the most part, the librarians of the state were anxious to be involved in the project. The reasons the librarians gave for not participating in the project, on the whole were justifiable: the library was moving to new quarters, the library had vacancies on its' professional staff, the library was in the process of initiating a new program at the time of the data collection period, also a few responded that the library

board voted not to participate in the project. In addition to our sample 17 libraries asked to be included in the performance measures project. They were accepted, and this brought the total number of participating libraries to 78. However, the data collected by these libraries is to be analyzed separately.

Workshops

The Library Research Center staff held six workshops across the state of Illinois in March and April in order to teach the use of the performance measures manual. The first workshop was for systems' personnel only; the other five were held in various regions for one to two staff members of each of the participating libraries.

The workshops were scheduled from approximately 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. They consisted of (1) a short opening address presenting the background on the performance measures study and the goals of the workshop, (2) a page-by-page presentation of the manual with demonstrations of many techniques and calculations, (3) lunch, (4) conclusion of the explanation of the manual, (5) a question and answer period, and (6) distribution of materials to each participating library.

Major questions and comments that were received from participants during the workshops included the following: (1) questions of the validity of the BPR sample of recently published books, especially for small public libraries, (2) questions of the applicability of the inter-library loan measure for Illinois, as nearly all inter-library loan requests are processed by the systems, (3) comments that the user tickets should have asked more questions,

(4) confusion over some of the definitions in the section on public service personnel availability, (5) comments that the circulation forms should have provided for periodicals, and the title availability forms should have provided for AV materials, (6) comments on the difficulty of measuring in-library circulation, and (7) general comments on the large amounts of time and staff apparently would be needed to collect the data.

Data Collection Period

All participating libraries were asked to conduct a three-day performance measures study, tabulate their data, and return the results to the Library Research Center within approximately four weeks from the date of their respective workshops. The last workshop was held on April 15, and as of June 6, 57 libraries of the sample group had submitted their data to the Library Research Center.

During the data collection period, the Library Research Center staff and systems personnel who had attended the first workshop attempted to handle any problems encountered by participants. In a few cases, systems personnel actually assisted libraries in the collection and tabulation of their data. Some of the systems' headquarters reviewed their member libraries' data before forwarding it to the Library Research Center. In two libraries, a State Library Consultant assisted in the data collection and tabulation.

Experiences in Using the Manual

Some of the participants enclosed comments with their study results, and they included the following: (1) the BPR sample was

too time consuming and of questionable value, (2) the sorting procedure for user tickets was difficult and very time consuming, (3) the section on patterns of staff assistance was not meaningful for small libraries (The librarians thought this was badly worded and hard to understand), (4) the title availability measures required a lot of work but produced a valuable profile of a library's collection, (5) the measurements did not give a complete picture of Illinois public libraries because of the availability of system and state-wide resources, (6) the tabulation procedures were time consuming but generally easy to follow, (7) patrons did not object to filling out user tickets, (8) a significant amount of volunteer help, especially in the smaller libraries, was necessary to conduct the evaluation, and (9) in general, the participating libraries commented that the evaluations required a lot of time and staff, but they considered the study worthwhile and were anxious to receive results.

The Library Research Center has sent a brief questionnaire to those participants, who did not enclose comments, in order to obtain additional comments on the performance measures study.

The Library Research Center staff's impression of the data that has been received so far is that it was properly collected and tabulated. However, the Research Center staff is still finding it necessary to devote a considerable amount of time to preparing the data for computer coding. In a number of instances totals were not requested on the forms. These must be tabulated prior to coding.

There appear to be at least two factors effecting the quality of the data. With some exceptions, the larger libraries and the

libraries that were represented at the workshops, tended to provide the best quality data in terms of accuracy and thoroughness.

Analysis of the Performance Measures Data

After the Library Research Center has received all of the data from the participating libraries, the Research Center staff will conduct additional statistical analysis which will include the development of indivudal profiles for each library and the establishment of patterns and levels of performance for the libraries by budget category.

Each library will be given a report that will provide its "scores" on most of the performance measures and, for purposes of comparison, the corresponding mean scores for all of the libraries of the appropriate size category.

In addition, the Research Center staff plans to correlate certain performance measures values for all libraries of each budget category with certain annual report values (e.g. total operating expenditures and population served) for all libraries of the same budget category. Although the LRC staff is going to provide each library with performance measure data for other libraries in their size category, the staff does not believe that the value of the measures is in comparing one library with another. Rather, it is the profile of an individual library's activities and use which is valuable.

Geographical and Expenditure Characteristics of Libraries In Study

Geog. Area	Original	Substitute	Extra	Total
Chicago	12	9	17	38
Northern	12	6	0	18
Central	9	5	0	14
Southern	5	3	0	8
Totals	38	23	17	78

All Libraries by Total Operating Expenditures

Geog. Area	0-10	10-20	20-50	50-100	100-300	300+	Total
Chicago	1	3	4	6	15	9	38
Northern	2	4	5	2	3	2	18
Central	1	4	3	1	2	3	14
Southern	0	2	1	2	3	0	8
Totals	4	13	13	11	23	14	78

Original = 38
Substitute = 23
Extra = 17
78